THE FUTURE IS FICTION

ADVENTURE CALLS

8-Bit Adventures 2: No Failure Is Final - A Conversation with Indie Dev Critical Games | Bitterwind: Pirates & Monsters Collide In Season 01 + Lost Tales | RPG Dolven | Gnomes | Games | Fiction | Protoculture | Shareware | Discordance | Venture Within…

EDITO-RIAL

At the core of the most emotive experiences in the world is story. It weaves its way through every medium humanity possesses: simple conversations at the watercooler, the visual arts, film and screen, our music, fiction, our buildings, and even our homes. Each of us comes with a unique story wholly of our own. And while we might not feel it, in our everyday acts of creation we are all storytellers.

Stories fill us with awe and wonder, taking us away to other worlds. They show us new sides of ourselves and our world–be that the beauty of the mundane or the brutality of small and large conflicts and every hue in between. By fuelling our imaginations, story invokes feeling. And in that moment, when you've found something that resonates with you and makes you feel deeply... Now, that's magic.

Games are essential. They enable play and, through it, re-creation (not a typo). Games, both on screens and in shared experiences such as role-playing games at a tabletop, allow you to take control of your characters and the narrative. You shape them in your mind and make them your own through your agency.

Adventure Calls is as much about magic and dreams as it is about games and fiction. As a medium, it is a work of fantasy and fiction all of its own with dalliances into reality. Adventure Calls aspires to highlight great works and the journeys of those who made them–those who heard adventure call and answered. Any work you read or game you play has started as something of an ember in the minds of its maker. It was kindled into flame and then fire, brought into the world through hard work and perseverance despite the at times overwhelming push to give up. And the fact that this happens at all, that I could be here writing these words, and you, Legend, be a reader, that any game is made–Space Invaders, Super Mario Bros, Dark Reign, Hollow Knight, Legend of Zelda, D&D, GTA, Elder Scrolls, Wipeout, Suikoden, Castlevania, or Doom–is not a small thing. No, it's magic.

There is a tendency to see magic only as the very unlikely made manifest, acts of the fantastical or the impossible where something takes place that defies the very laws of our universe. I argue that any game that ships, any story or volume of fiction that is published, is magic of the most human kind.

These are strange roads we walk down in stranger times. But, esteemed readers and Noble Hearts, we walk them with you. It's our hope–nay, our very desire–that we will create magic together and continually reveal its abundance to you by shining a light on it.

Do you believe in magic? We do. Let's see where this journey takes us, together.

Mike Roberts, Editor

TKFY

THE KIDS FROM YESTERDAY

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DUNGEON SOUP

“Dungeon Soup is the best Dungeons & Dragons inspired animated short channel, bar none!”– TKFY

This irreverent fantasy-comedy and its wild cast of characters have racked up tens of millions of views on YouTube, and with thousands of active supporters, the show and its creators have become a full-time indie animation studio. If you love Adventure Time, D&D, and dark–very dark–humour, you just found your new favourite show.

“The Little Man Intrigues Me...”

Dungeon Soup introduces you to heroes ‘The Barbarian’ (our favourite) and Kevin the Paladin, as well as the Adventurers of Gnome Quest. The Wizard King and a host of other memorable heroes, monsters, and villains make up the growing cast as hilarious adventures unfold in semi-serialised fantasy inspired sketches full of fantasy tropes and fun.

Dirty druid gnomes stalk their ‘masters’, Vampire lords decorate their homes, dark elves wax poetic about their blades, orcs burn, and many monsters are slain. It’s chaos of the best kind, and at TKFY, we’re here for it.

▲ D&D–the fertile ground in which this Unicorn was bred.

▲ You can watch 10 *hours* of this badass getting pin-cushioned!

“Hammered Into Perfection By Dwarven Blacksmiths With Autism...”

Originally cooked up as a ‘soup’ of fantasy related animated shorts, Dungeon Soup was a moonshot by Canadian animator Russell ‘Donjon-Soup’ and a salve to burnout and a lack of inspiration in his day job. He saved as much money as he could and went all in, quitting his day job.

The adventures of Russell and his friends in their home D&D campaign would become the inspiration for the 3-month production of ‘Gnome Quest’ episode 1 and the ongoing ‘Gnome Quest’ Soup series. By episode 2 of Gnome Quest, Russell found his footing, but not the money to continue full-time production. Dungeon Soup would become a side project once again.

Despite the lack of immediate and early success, Russell doubled down, and that commitment paid off. With the creation of the first Barbarian episode, the channel found its blueprint in both its humour and style, paving the way for the success of the channel and its episodes today.

“...So, You Know It’s Good.”

Mount your mermaid or dragon and take a squirt of lemon in the eye–thank us later. Watch the escapades of The Barbarian and Kevin the Paladin on Dungeon Soup on YouTube. You can support Dungeon Soup both on YouTube and Patreon.

Creator: ***Dungeon Soup***

Genre: ***Animated, Fantasy, Comedy***

Platform: ***YouTube***

VIVA LA DIRT LEAGUE

▲ “She’ll be back. And in greater numbers...”

▲ “Why, hello Adventurer!” Greg is such a sweetheart. “SKIP!”

The comedy crew you didn’t know you needed

Never heard of Viva La Dirt League? You’re missing out, big time. Don’t worry, we’re here to fix that. Trust us, we were all in the dark once too—until we found them.

A pop culture comedy feast awaits if you’re discovering Viva La Dirt League (VLDL) for the first time. I stumbled upon them through ‘Epic NPC Man’ when a mate I was grinding Warcraft with sent me a link to ‘Breast Plate’—you know, the skit about female armour in video games (if you’ve played, you get it). VLDL doesn’t mess around when it comes to roasting every gaming trope under the sun. Then I hit ‘Bored,’ and boom—that was it. Hooked.

“Epic NPC Man brings people in, but Bored keeps them coming back.” — VLDL

VLDL kicked off in New Zealand, brainchild of mates Rowan Bettjeman, Alan Morrison, and Adam King. Their shared obsession with filmmaking and gaming birthed the wonder that is the VLDL YouTube channel today. With over 7.5 million subscribers and hundreds of videos across nearly a dozen series, it’s nuts that after 14 years, some folks still haven’t clocked on. But, that’s why Protoculture exists!

Our final word on VLDL? Smash that ‘like’ and ‘subscribe’ button, and dive into the chaos: **youtube.com/@vivaladirtleague.**

Creator: ***Viva La Dirt League***

Genre: ***Comedy, Action, Fantasy***

Platform: ***YouTube***

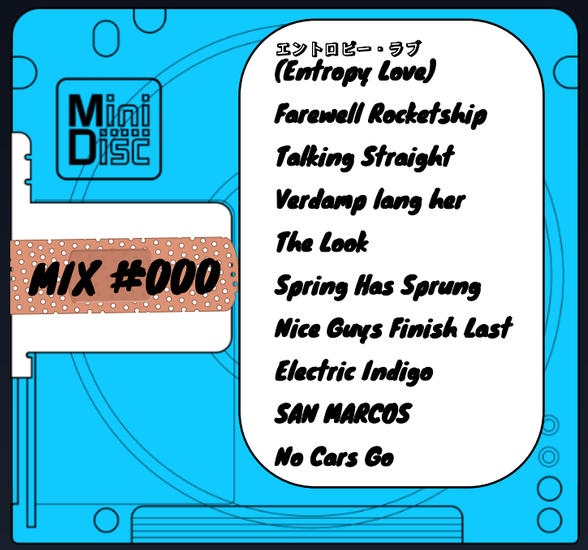
EPIC NPC MAN
What if an NPC (non-player character) knew they were in a video game? This is the premise of ‘Epic NPC Man’. It’s World Of Warcraft meets Skyrim in the fictional video game of ‘Skycraft’! Journey to Azerim where you meet Greg the Garlic Farmer who is increasingly aware that his world is not as it seems. He’s joined by Bodger the Blacksmith and Baradun the Archmage of Azerim in this hilarious and long-running comedy series which is part celebration and part parody of RPG’s and the people who play them.

BORED
A hilarious, outrageous and accurate parody of gaming retail. Bored is the GOAT of VLDL. It’s store manager of Playtech / TechTown Rowan and his red shirt peasants, Alan, Adam and Abby against the world. Special mention to Ben, literally the worst customer in the world. We love you though, Ben. Easter Egg: Look out for posters for ‘Skycraft’ at both the Playtech and TechTown franchises.

DEV
AAA game development is a tough business. But what if your game made bucket loads of money every month, and that all you cared about was making even more? And... The company was run by assholes. This is a series about Blizz... Arctic Storm Entertainment, the developers of–you guessed it–Skycraft!

LOGIC SERIES & ONE-SHOTS
These themed skit series’ based on your favourite gaming properties! We’re talking Red Dead Redemption 2, Dark Souls, Witcher, PUBG, Apex Legends, Dead By Daylight, Dungeons & Dragons and more.

VIVA LA DIRT LEAGUE D&D
Yet still you want more? There’s a totally dedicated DND channel too, where each show is set in the VLDL Universe. Watch NPC DND, Azerim Adventures and Bored Horror!



Listen.

LOVE X LOVE

▲ Artwork by @nerdroaring

Bitterwind

Pirates. Monsters. And Ham. Seriously. Drawing inspiration from the likes of Monty Python, Discworld, Treasure Island, and every other pirate fiction and pop mythology gem out there. For the first time ever—maybe?— we're unleashing Bitterwind! Trust us, it's a wickedly good time.

'Bitterwind: Season 01' is a book–Nay! A small wonder tome. A wild anthology of high-sea adventure stories, packed with pirates, monsters, demons, rogues, and every ne'er-do-well you can imagine. All set in a fantastical world where imagination, magic, and the unknown rule. And guess what? It's the first self-published novella from TKFY (yep, that's us!).

Dive into this witches' brew of fantasy mythos and get ready to be blown off course across vast oceans, explore mysterious locations, and witness epic sea battles featuring pirates, demons, and ancient monsters. Oh, and did we mention cursed weapons, vampires, ghosts, airships, and maybe even... seafood?

> **Get ready for an ongoing saga that's one heck of an adventure. Season 1 is just the thrilling start of this journey. I can't wait to see where these stories take us, both now and in the future.**
> **– Mike (Co-Creator)**

Got ham?
Head over to tkfy.co/bitterwind to find out everything and grab your copy. Plus, you can read Bitterwind online for free right there or on Royal Road. And don't miss the audio productions dropping each month on our YouTube Channel.

Hold up. I can read it right now?!
You bet! Check out the very first Bitterwind Lost Tale: 'Into the River. Tossed' on page 19 of this rad magazine. No spoilers, but it's a blast. And guess what? You'll find more Lost Tales from Bitterwind in the very next issue of 'Adventure Calls'.

We're stoked to share Bitterwind with you and hope you'll dig it as much as we've loved making it.

Creator: ***The Kids From Yesterday***

Genre: ***Adventure, Fantasy***

Platform: ***tkfy.co***

DOLVEN

The ancient Darkstrand Empire has almost been forgotten by time. In the shadows, their final move is now playing out in the Decaying Isle.

In the small village of Dolven, the seeds of the Darkstrand Empire's return are coming to fruition. Dark times have befallen the town and its people.

A Darkness has been festering, growing there in secret. It has begun drawing in those who might fulfil its dark designs: vagabonds, monsters and demons. And this Darkness calls to you too... Adventurer.

Dolven is a fantasy turn-based RPG combined with a powerful card deck builder and magic system. In Dolven, you create your own adventurer and recruit up to three other adventurers, each taking on one of six available classes: Archer, Cleric, Guardian, Mage, Rogue, or Warrior. Collect and equip loot and magic items scattered throughout dungeons while expanding your deck of magical cards, remnants of the forgotten empire, which is seeking to return.

To survive, you'll need to utilise every advantage. From character positioning to effective buffs, debuffs, and abilities, all while ensuring you play your cards right to turn the tide of combat in your favour.

Developed and produced by Covyne Entertainment and The Kids From Yesterday, you can wishlist Dolven and play the demo on Steam today.

Creator: ***Covyne Entertainment, TKFY***

Genre: ***Tactical Turn-Based RPG***

Platform: ***Windows, MacOS, (Steam)***

▲ Collect loot and outfit your adventurers for victory.

▲ Infernis is summoned by a well played card on an alter! Playing your cards right is essential to overcoming your foes in Dolven.

Overflowing with that 'one more game' quality, this dark and chaotic tower defence rogue-lite hit by DYSTOPIAN is a quiet riot!

Are You Prepared?
Well good for you Snackwizzle Snozzboots. Because, I wasn't! Tower defence and roguelites are not my jam–I don't play them. Gnomes surprised me. It's everything that's great about these games and had me completely hooked, even if I'm not a fan of the genre.

You play as a village of righteous gnomes with violent tendencies trying to defend themselves and their crops from hordes of villainous goblins encroaching on their territory.

Choose your 'Guild'–a combination of your starter types for gnome, home and crop, as well as a relic which provides you a boon for your game, select your biome (either geared for success or a challenge) and survive.

Survival is lasting the day (wave) without your home's life expiring. Each day starts with a preparation phase where you can choose to build more homes, recruit more gnomes, or plant additional crops as you invest in your future. You place your gnomes strategically (think of your gnomes as mobile towers). Good positioning can take advantage of, or even alter, the path of attacking goblins to ensure your home survives not just this night, but those that follow.

Listen, Crumpdank! No two runs are the same.
Procedurally generated maps and layouts, the selection of a variety of enemy goblin types for each day as well as their positioning, ensure that every day–every run–feels fresh and fun.

Relics increase the variety further still, as well as your chances of survival. You can purchase relics from the shop which is tied to the in-game economy of Gnomes. This adds loads of variety to each run as relics bolsters the 'push pull' of a wonderfully addictive series of trade offs.

Each day relics in the shop are shuffled and while investing in crops seemed like a good idea, those boots would have come in handy with that swamp growing...

Self Made Success
Gnomes was born of a love affair with the games such as *Age Of Empires 2* and *Warcraft 3* and the simple idea of having moveable garden gnomes... With knives, hammers. and bloodlust. The mad dogs at DYSTOPIAN, Pat (lead programmer) and Tommy (creative director), broke early with the popular convention of using a mainstream game engine and rolled their own: GNOME ENGINE. The result feels unique and snappy, but nostalgic in all it's pixel art glory, feeling both old-school and fresh all at once. And, gamers agree. At over *35000* copies sold and growing this indie banger is a quiet Aussie hit flying under the radar.

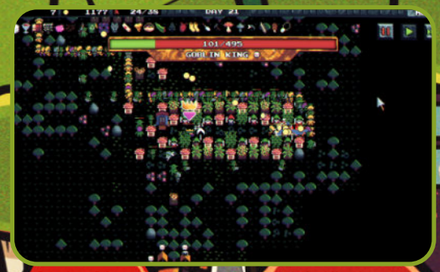
Now, begone, dear reader! Play Gnomes! It's on Steam now. Go add another extremely positive review to the almost 1000 already there!

Platform: ***Windows (Steam)***

Genre: ***Turn-Based, Tower Defence, Rogue-Lite.***

Creator: ***DYSTOPIAN***

▲ Guilds are unique way of customising your play experience!

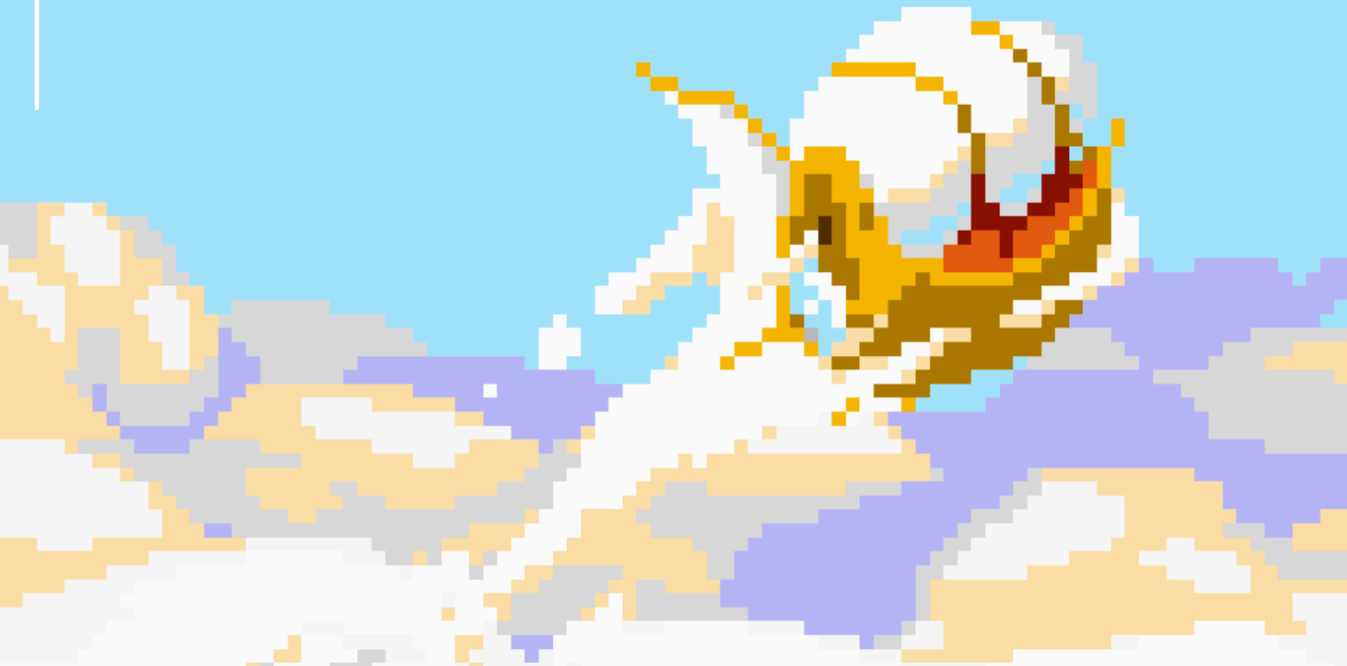


▲ On day 21 we slew that pesky Goblin King!

Artwork by @richard.oregan

No Failure Is Final

The Origin Story Of Josh Hallaran, Critical Games & 8-Bit Adventures 2.



I was at a small theatre near my hometown when I met the unfailingly polite and ever jubilant Josh Hallaran, and played 8-Bit Adventures 2 (8BA2), for the first time.

A fellow game developer, Josh's demo of 8BA2 was running on a Nintendo Switch development kit next to several other game demos being exhibited as part of a showcase for the Central Coast Game Developers group (CCGD). *This is my kind of game*, I thought as I sat down to play.

It was a pixel art RPG, self-described as NES+ with an 8-Bit retro aesthetic, great art and music. Being a fan of the Golden Age RPGs of the 1990s, I loved the turn based mechanics and Critical Games' take on what I felt was a Phantasy Star style battle system; familiar but distinct with it's own unique features and design.

As I played the game I asked many questions, "This was made in Gosford?" I confirmed.

Josh nodded. The game had been designed and made only 20 minutes from where I live. In my mind an 11 year old version of myself was conjured, gamepad in hand. That version of me could never have believed that such a thing was possible. Video games were made anywhere else but here, and all the games that I loved were made in Japan.

9 years in the making, Josh and his small team have produced a wonderful homage to that Golden Age of the console role playing game–a game that is story rich and earnest, with a cast of warm and hopeful characters set in a vast world on the brink of destruction.

This is the origin story of Josh Hallaran, Critical Games, and 8-Bit Adventures 2.

▲ Real talk. All great RPGs require an ancient talking tree. It's science...

▲ Don't ever make the 'nice' robot mad!

Just A Kid With A Dream

Hallaran's passion for game development was sparked in childhood by iconic titles like Mario 64, Ocarina of Time and Golden Age RPGs such as Chrono Trigger. Growing up on Australia's Central Coast, he was enchanted by these virtual worlds and dreamed of crafting his own. This passion drove Josh to experiment early with game engines, leading him to drop out of college in Sydney to pursue game development full-time.

In 2011, he founded Critical Games and released his first game, Path of Thanatos, on niche RPG Maker internet forums to mixed reactions. Like Charlie, his very vocal and unrelenting protagonist of 8-Bit Adventures 2, he just wouldn't give up.

An Epic Journey

After years of honing his craft through various projects, Josh embarked on the journey to make 8-Bit Adventures 2–his most ambitious undertaking ever at that time. Initially planned as a two-year project, it evolved into a nearly nine-year odyssey due to its expansive scope and his four person team's dedication to quality. Collaborating with artist Jerram Fahey, composer Sebastián Cruz, and programmer Sufyan Noor, Josh sought to create a game that honoured the golden age of JRPGs while embracing modern design. The result is a 30-40 hour adventure that captivates with its heartfelt narrative, strategic gameplay, and vibrant retro aesthetics, released digitally on PC in January 2023 and on consoles in October 2024.

Trials & Triumphs

The development of 8-Bit Adventures 2 was fraught with challenges, from technical hurdles like optimising for console hardware to navigating player feedback. Early on, players found the timed text feature cumbersome, prompting Josh to introduce a "fast text" option and a run button, enhancing the player experience. External factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, brought both opportunities—like exposure at IGN's Gamescom stream—and setbacks, including isolation during lockdowns.

"I'm too stubborn to give up," Josh admitted, reflecting on moments when completion seemed elusive.

His resilience has culminated in a critically acclaimed release, with 8BA2 earning a 94% positive rating on Steam from more than 250 player reviews.

"The Charm & Style Of Retro, Without The Limitations."

It was fitting then that I'd just finished my annual playthrough of Squaresoft's Chrono Trigger when I began playing 8-Bit Adventures 2. The DNA of that classic RPG, and many others, is all over this indie RPG banger.

8BA2 transports players to a video game world threatened by the Glitch, an entity with reality-warping powers. Seven unique characters, each with distinct abilities and backstories, band together to save the world, navigating dungeons and battling formidable foes. The game's strategic turn-based combat, featuring team attacks and 'Omega Bursts', keeps gameplay dynamic and engaging.

Its emotional depth and retro charm have struck a chord, with players forming strong connections with all of the colourful cast of characters.

CRITICAL GAMES

2011

2013

2015

2016

2018

2023

2024

2025

"Every party member has fans," Josh noted, highlighting the care invested in their development. There's absolutely an earnestness to each of Josh's characters which has resonated deeply with players.

Art and Music: A Retro Renaissance

The game's visual and auditory allure is a testament to the talents of Jerram Fahey and Sebastián Cruz. Their pixel art and NES-accurate soundtrack evoke the nostalgia of classic JRPGs while incorporating modern flair, creating an immersive experience that feels both timeless and fresh. From vibrant world maps to evocative battle themes, these elements elevate 8-Bit Adventures 2 into a love letter to the genre's golden era.

A Dream in Physical Form

One of the most exciting milestones for 8-Bit Adventures 2 was the physical release through Limited Run Games. For Josh, a lifelong game collector, this is a deeply personal achievement. "Having a physical release is just the dream come true. It's like the game isn't real until I can hold it in my hands," he shared with enthusiasm. Available for Nintendo Switch and PlayStation 5, this edition includes all digital updates and DLC, offering fans a tangible piece of this retro-inspired masterpiece and marking a significant moment for Critical Games.

Looking Ahead

With 8-Bit Adventures 2 now available in digital and physical formats, Josh and Critical Games are forging ahead and their vision remains rooted in creating meaningful, player-driven experiences from the heart of Australia's Central Coast. Free 8BA2 DLC released in early 2025 added new content, enhancing replayability, while Infinite Alliance was announced, which promises a fresh adventure for fans of not only his games, but several others in this first of its kind indie RPG cross-over game!

> **"More than anything, I hope players have fun."**
> **- Josh, Developer**

A Legacy of Joy

As our conversation drew to a close, Josh shared his ultimate hope: "More than anything, I hope players have fun." And this sentiment encapsulates 8-Bit Adventures 2—a labor of love crafted to spark joy and adventure. In an industry often led by global giants, his game stands as a beacon of indie ingenuity, proving that creativity and perseverance can thrive anywhere. Josh Hallaran and Critical Games have not only delivered a remarkable game but have also inspired other developers to chase their dreams. Josh's last words of encouragement to those aspiring creators, seeking adventure?

"No failure is final."

Platforms: ***Nintendo Switch, Playstation, Xbox, Windows (Steam)***

Genre: ***J-RPG***
Creator: ***Critical Games***

▲ *Artwork by Ryan Jampole, @jampolinski*

Parasite Attack 1984

It's 1984 in an alternative universe where aliens attack the planet. The last line of defence? You–a terminal operator keying in artillery co-ordinates to the rhythmic 'click-clack' of your mechanical keyboard.

> *Parasite Attack 1984 is a retro arcade defence game where you blast giant parasites from the sky using keyboard controlled artillery, all in glorious 16-colour pixel graphics. It would have blown you away back in the 80s.*
> *– Simon, Developer, DoubleWord Labs.*

We agree with him!

Creator: ***DoubleWord Labs***

Genre: ***Arcade, Retro***

Platform: ***Windows, MacOS, Linux (Steam)***

▲ We can hear the sound of this thing!

FICTION

One Last Door

Fantasy/Table Top

I looked across the table at Dungeon Master, his face expressionless.

Was he faking me out?

I'd heard his dice hit the table – several – followed by that telltale chuckle; followed by that familiar question.

"What do you do?" repeated Dungeon Master.

I rolled my shoulders, sighing as I wiped my brow.

"I slowly open the door."

"Sigmund, wait!" came a cry from across the table.

It was too late.

Dungeon's Master's voice was all menace.

"As your gauntleted hand turns the aged handle, the unassuming door before you opens... effortlessly. Peering through the darkness, a mirror begins to take shape at the centre of your vision. The mirror starts to glow. Ethereal, it hangs on the wall, its light pulsing gently like a warm heart beats. In your mind, and your mind only Sigmund. .. A deep thrum grows; Building."

"Transfixed on the mirror, I begin to arch forward and walk toward it."

“A voice, beautiful beckons, Come to me, Sigmund.”

"Oh geez, oh geez! We shoulda left... I told you!"

Doubts and accusations flew across the table.

They were right. We shouldn't be here. We'd triumphed. We had everything... Why was the Wizard always right?

"I resist the voice... Wait! Is it hers?"

"Roll wisdom, to resist. Then roll insight... To know. The check for both is fifteen."

Grinning, Dungeon Master stared through me.

My lucky die rolled across the table. Its magic had faded in the last five minutes.

"Nine."

A smile.

"You step into the darkness of the room beyond the door frame. The thrum in your mind builds and you begin to flinch with agonising pain. Each step closer feels like the fatigue of days of forced marching. Compelled, your body moves forward – a thrall no more under your control."

I rolled again.

"Fourteen. Plus insight nineteen!"

Dungeon Master's voice now a low whisper.

"In your mind, and your mind only Sigmund... Sheryl's voice echoes, her words a bitter honey, Come to me. Enter. Remake me. Love me again as you did once, Sigmund.”

"I reach for my blade...”

"Your body does not answer your call. Step. Thunk. Step. You continue moving.“

"I try to scream to my companions..."

Dungeon Master cut me off.

"Resisting, you try to form words and save your friends. Roll to resist, Adventurer!"

I blew in my hands as I rubbed them together and warmed the many sided die I held as I had done many times during our adventures.

The die clattered across the table. Over and over it tumbled.

Slowing finally.

It tipped over... Twenty!

"End me! Do it now!" I screamed as I slammed my fist onto the table.

“It’s Sheryl!"

I heard Dungeon Master behind his screen roll his dice.

"The thrum in your mind intensifies. You can no longer resist. The magical forces compelling you forward are the only thing keeping your body and mind together at all."

He turned then.

"What do you do?" asked Dungeon Master.

He gazed around the table at each of the faces of my four companions.

A look of surprise. Another, a look of wonder.

And the Wizard... Grim knowing.

They hesitated.

Then I knew darkness and the wet warmth of their blood as I slaughtered them all.

One.
Last.
Door.

Author: ***Mike Roberts***
Publisher: ***TKFY***
Category: ***One Shot***

Author: ***Mike Roberts***
Publisher: ***TKFY***
Category: ***Serial***

Into The River Tossed

A Bitterwind Story

Delphi was cold this time of year. The Pickled Boar was warm and dry, so the tavern was full. It smelt unmopped for weeks–sweet and reassuring to the regulars.

Three old sea dogs sat in a corner adding to the smoke and drinking, which is to say they did little of either while their yarn they spun.

“Tom. All I’m saying is that pigs have a right to their bacon,” Faulkner trumpeted.

“Next you’ll say the Reach is real,” spat back Tom.

“It is. Look.” Faulkner pulled a bundle of folded up paper from his coat on the back of his chair, “I kept this. A sketch, done last month. Artists own rendition. See the sign there, ‘The Reach’.”

“Look at all those teeth,” said Linus wistfully, “Got to be happy with that level of dental care. I’d love that many teeth.” He watched the girl polishing a stretch of the bar across the room.

“Queen’s Council said it was all malarkey,” Tom said, “Every paper...”

“...and crier,” said Faulkner finishing for Tom. “The same thing. Right? Is that not suspicious to you?”

“Aye Faulkner, would the truth not be consistent?” argued Tom.

“Not if they’re all in cahoots with the same incense! This picture tells a whole story. Truth printed, and in my sweaty hand,” finished Faulkner with a flourish that came off more silly than the scholarly impression he’d been shooting for.

“Incentives,” corrected Linus.

“I only trust Royal Printing. Anything else is bad news,” mumbled Tom.

Linus took a sip of his drink, sighed, rubbed his eyes.

“Gentlemen, are we not but more bad apples, distracting from what matters? If not with our small actions then our words here?” he asked.

“The Unrest?” asked Faulkner.

“Is it even happening?” asked Tom.

Linus shook his head as he gestured to the bustling room around them.

“And does any of it matter? Prefer my news local. And right now, apart from almost empty mugs, our troubles are few.”

*

Elsewhere, far away, the coin flipped end over end. But, it was theatre. And if the fight was going to happen, which it was...

“Best throw first,” Logan thought.

His cannonball-like fists cracked the thugs face with a one-two before the coin reached its zenith. The bear of a fella fell hard and the Bear didn’t get back up.

Logan thought he could take on three like the Bear if he stayed quick and avoided being grappled.

But, what he didn’t know was that it didn’t matter.

He shaped up as the first of the Bears’ mates sauntered in sneering and chuckling.

“You’re so fucked, *mate*.”

And Logan was fucked, he just didn’t know it yet. The Bear was Queensman.

As were several other off duty soldiers around the tavern. As was the smelly mug that threw the lazy right hook at him.

Logan edged inside the arc of the Mug's punch, shifted past the obvious left jab thrown next, and cracked the Mug with a righteous uppercut. The force lifted Mug off the ground and sent him arching back to fall hard next to his mate.

A whistle blew from somewhere and the tavern hushed with the percussion of downed tankards, glasses and scraping stools. Overcoats came off, and a dozen or more soldiers were now on duty.

"Farrrk," mumbled Logan. Queensmen weren't supposed to be in this part of town and definitely not *here*.

He dropped his fists as the third of the Bear's companions strolled toward him confidently. The smaller one with the lazy eye who drooled.

"Don't 'spose you'd all take a firm apology and a round of drinks?" Logan asked.

Lazy-eye laughed and cracked his knuckles.

Logan didn't see who put the tart chemical-smelling bag over his head, but he felt Lazy-eye's fists. And, finally, he felt the solid crack of of a steel cudgel strike him.

*

"We should do our bit and stay in line," argued Linus.

"But, something's happening at Yonder's Reach. Or happened. And it might affect us all."

"Heresy," warned Tom as he wagged his finger, "The official word is everything is fine."

"Lazy," clapped back Faulkner, but he spoke more quietly all the same. "If it's not the narrative, the royal one, it's all 'heresy'."

"Show me that picture again," asked Linus.

Faulkner handed it over.

"This same picture from your artist, last month you say? I'm sure it was in yesterday's local out of Conladle. Not Royal Press, mind, and the paper's out of favour, I heard."

"A thousand thousand men, all ferried, no trial. Some pirates and other convicts among them no doubt. Ferried to 'somewhere' for decades," preached Faulkner.

*

The dank ship rocked toward a destination unknown, pregnant with other slaves and prisoners like Logan. The wood and ropes creaked.

He pulled his manacled hands away from where he fingered his matted hair. The blood was dry.

"Winston, I'm not usually this daft," he said quietly to the darker and older man across from him.

"I call you fool," chuckled his only friend. They both smiled.

"How'd you get here then, learned man?"

Winston's smile wavered a moment as he leaned over to check on a sickly looking man propped up on some ruined sail tarp.

"Similar, but less stupid. I was fishing where I shouldn't be, like many others. I was slower than them."

"Anyone know where they're taking us?"

"No one knows. Drafted me in from the cells at Pickering 'bout nineteen days ago. Ship was almost full then, but they'd lost a few."

"And I got thumped in the port of Villa Swayne... Southward that means."

"Best I can tell. But coulda turned anywhere since. Been a day since they tossed you in here. I thought you were dead. Like the others, maybe. Something went through the fleet and killed a dozen or so. Survivor's were split between our boat and another." Winston gestured to the unconscious man as he turned over the cloth on his head.

Logan watched carefully.

"Why do you care?"

"Faith."

"The Gods are dead."

"Are they now?" he grinned, "No one told me."

The pause lingered and Logan picked up where they'd left off.

"Not much south of the Villa. Asshole of the world and all..."

"Speaking of assholes, rumour has it this boat is one of Jigsaw's."

Logan felt icy fingers press slowly through his veins; Deep cold threaded throughout him.

"One of the old boys is ex-Queensman. Reckon's he noticed Jigsaw's mark on one of the soldiers."

There'd been so many rumours.

"You don't think..."

*

"The Reach is real. And this is where they were taking all those lads," finished Faulkner.

"*Unless*, it's a lie," argued Tom.

"Conspiracy by the Unrest?" retorted Faulkner.

"That's what they were saying, so that's what I heard," said Tom.

Linus found the paper he was looking for in his bag.

"Never read the headline of this. Was only curious about the bat and ball in back."

Linus held up the cover of the broadsheet paper Faulkner and Tom to see.

The headline read, "Debunked! Rebel Nonsense Stirs Unrest."

"Same picture as yours."

Faulkner massaged his forehead.

"This is what they do..." he gritted.

"And the month before last they cleared up that rogue memo that went out. From the Ministry."

"Yeah, Faulks mate. That one that had you all in a fluff," said Tom.

"The mayor just made a mistake," smiled Linus as he chewed some stale bread.

Tom nodded sagely, "The old geezer fixed up a couple of words and, presto! All better. You were so worried."

"But, this is what they do. It's a cover up."

"Cover up? No, no. 'Revisions'," said Tom. "Felt good about the rename, honest. Snug in my bunk inside like."

"Yeah," spat Faulkner finally, "a world of revisions sounds a lot more comfortable than the lies they traffic. 'Getting it right!' They said. That's a slogan there," he snorted.

A younger man squeezed past them in the busy tavern.

"Let's be careful now, matey," cautioned Linus. "Voice low. We 'refine with you and your big ideas."

"The Queen wouldn't be. Her Listener's are everywhere," reprimanded Tom.

"... for our safety," finished Faulkner.

"Drinks?" asked Linus.

*

"Yonders fucking Reach", thought Logan, as he, Winston and a few others were brought above deck by two younger Queensmen.

"I need a drink..."

The panorama and the smell of the penal colony took Logan's breath from him. It was the sound, sights and smell of half dead ants labouring in blood, and shit, and piss. It was the scope and scale of the operation; a partially excavated exotic stone ruin lodged deep into the side of an island volcano and the thousand prisoners that laboured to reveal its secrets within. The enormous structure appeared to have been once consumed wholly by the earth and stone and time. The wind blew.

It's almost time, Logan heard a voice say.

"That's a tomb," said Winston to Logan. His voice was hard.

One of the Queensmen pointed his cudgel at Logan and Winston and slapped it hard on his gloved hands.

"Shut it."

Boots thumped toward them on the wharf where they stood.

"Fodder 1109 delivered, sir," said the other, as he stood to attention and handed over a clipboard to the approaching clerk. The clerk was flanked by a small continent of lackeys. He had hard eyes.

Those hard eyes narrowed in his pinched face as he flipped through the convict fleets manifest.

"You're short 47 souls. He won't be pleased."

But a smell wafted over, and the clerk caught the scent. His nose lifted to test the air, take it in, and confirm his suspicions.

"Is that... calamari? And..." the nose lifted again, "Ham?"

"We thought... That is, the Captain thought, you might find your sums on that there manifest potentially *improved* on a fuller stomach?"

The clerk didn't blink as he stared down at the guard who now looked more hopeful than nervous, his own courage bolstered by the smell of the ham.

"I'll take the ham." He clicked his fingers and gestured to one of his men, "The calamari. Take it to Warden Jigsaw," he ordered. "Let him know it came from me."

Logan noticed then the larger man off to the side with an apron on. He looked strong, but old. Older than he should. At his hip was a massive cleaver, notched and rusted. The large man followed the runner.

Old, like him. Like her, came the voice.

That was twice now. The voice wasn't Winston, thought Logan, and it didn't sound like himself.

*

"You're imagining things!" exclaimed Tom, "And whose got time for this? Barnacles to scrape, now my own ears too?"

Tom got up to leave.

"That Queen. She's the best one we've ever had, I'd say," said Linus a little more loudly than he had too.

"The king wouldn't much think so," said Faulkner, eyes closed and sighing over his mug.

"It's not the kings fault that..."

A familiar face clapped Tom on the back, cutting him off.

"You old bastards! Have I got one for ya's. Just got in and thought old Faulks here would want to hear this."

Uninvited the fat man with the dirty bird on his shoulder and thick ale-wet moustache sat himself at the table. He spoke quiet, more for the drama of it than discretion.

"Came straight from the dock. I heard this from a young fella, stout though, mind. Out Tabathea way. His old crew made of with some kind of weapon. I heard this from a second mate that was close with the first who'd jumped ship before they were boarded. He said there was a rumour that the throne is false."

These tales were like the tides, and, in spite of himself, Tom sat back down.

"Joss ya we fat bastard," greeted Tom smiling as he say back down, "Tabathea is 10000 leagues from here if," and he tossed a look like a stone at Faulkner, "like the Reach I might add, is even real. Would that news even travel this far?"

"Why, for it doth travel on the wings of handsome young babes like myself! Rugged seadog that I am," laughed Joss. He stomp his feet, "You're not that old you lot. Get out there. See the truth of the matters yourselves."

"Well they'd be changed! Especially given those braggarts that carry them."

"Look, it's not her fault he died," said Linus looking a million miles away around the room again, "Nor that brother of his."

They were all silent.

"Don't say it out loud," said Tom.

"I didn't," whispered Faulkner.

"You thought it," accused Tom, looking at Joss.

"I thought it," Joss confirmed.

"Codswallop and sticky arse, ya halfwits!" yelled Linus.

*

"Rubbish! That's what it is," complained Logan.

The ruin was claustrophobic. The oil lanterns that hung from the cart they were pushing rattled and glowed softly down the dark emerald green stone hallway.

Logan paused to wipe the sweat off his brow, "How many more do you think we gotta toss?"

The older man shrugged. "Today? Until we join them?"

"Rather be a garbo I 'spose than excavating. I counted them for the first few weeks."

Winston reverently tucked a limp arm of one of the dozen bodies back into the cart as they pushed further into the mountain.

The work was gruelling. They'd both been lucky to avoid harder labour and luckier to have been kept together in the weeks since they arrived at the Yonder's Reach facility.

"The stones are old here. Old, like they know things." offered Winston.

Logan nodded as he pushed the cart. Even he could see that the stone was different–more like steel than what he'd seen of the outer ruin.

It was primeval. The carvings were maybe stories, letters of words. Maybe numbers? The markings were unfamiliar in their shape and styling to both convicts. They were everywhere here though.

They stopped to take a swig from their canteens. This was the last leg of their journey into the ruin. Here the old stone hallway rose up to the summit where they'd dump the latest shipment of glorious dead into the magma of the volcano far below.

"Something here speaks to me," confessed Logan, sweat pouring off his face.

"Did you speak back?" asked Winston.

"No. Wait... Only once."

"No more then?"

"It's hard."

Winston nodded.

"A darkness gathers here, and not just Jigsaw."

A familiar red glow illuminated the darkness ahead.

From a barrel of brackish water they pulled out and donned wet hoods fashioned from flour sacks and draped as much wet cloth over themselves as they could.

Winston's breath was laboured. Logan noticed.

"Almost there, fella. Just over the lip."

Logan's voice was muffled through his wet hood.

They pushed the cart of bodies into the furnace-like belly of the volcano.

Before them stretched out the remnants of a web of broken stone bridges. They reached out like the buckled fingers of smashed hands, each unable to clasp the other.

Wind from far above whipped the heat about him as Logan edged a look down at the molten lake below. The heat hit him hard. The belly hissed and groaned as it digested stone, its molten appetite insatiable.

"Quickly," urged Winston, snapping Logan from his revery.

Methodically, they eased the cart toward the edge and started readying the drop. Winston opened the gate of the cart. Logan knocked the heavy blocks in front of the wheels of the cart then joined Winston at the back where he waited for him.

"Together now," grunted Logan and they heaved with all their might. This load was heavier than the last.

The cart tipped up as they pressed and the bodies slowly slid and rolled forward. They tumbled one at a time at first, and then all at once–falling ragdolls–down to the fiery resting place below.

The carts' stocks thumped as they dropped the tray of the cart. The ruins shuddered, almost as call and response– Like a bell tolls: only at the appointed time.

Inevitable. The word, a voice, sounded in Logan's mind.

Ignoring it like, like last time, he stole another look over the edge and watch as the last of the prisoners burned and disappeared beneath the slow weaving of the molten waves. The slow violence of the sight ensnared him.

The world around them shook violently then.

Winston held firm to the cart and dropped to his knees. But, Logan was near the edge. Only he heard the voice of the mountain and those terrible words were unfamiliar.

Then, he fell.

*

Bang! The mug of ale slammed down unreasonably hard on the table. Linus, Faulkner, Tom and Joss were all sauced now.

"No I didn't. Did I?" said Faulkner, clenching Tom's shirt in his fist.

"Didn't what?" came his stupefied response from his sloppy face.

"Yonders Reach, just propaganda, aye?"

"Sailed near there once. Pretty. They almost got me."

"Shove off, ya did, Joss," said Linus, "You're stirring 'em up!"

"Ok, but I spoke to a fella who very nearly did and he said it was pretty. A scholar really. He could read..."

"I can read," said Linus tapping something on the table.

"The drink menu? A local rag? Sure. But this guy. Read *anything*. He showed me this big book. Fancy letters of a dead language. Smelt old. Told me Yonder was a legend. Fae story for the befuddled. He read it and read what the recorded words of the Ministry had said. Then he said there's no evidence it exists because he went there. Airy-go, it never existed. And he wrote the book on it."

"That just means there's no evidence," said Faulkner.

"Ah! I thought the same thing, wasn't going to get me with flawed logic. But, then he pulled out another book, another big official seal on it. And then there was a song he sung, by that popular fella. And by that stage it was clear to me that *that many people* couldn't all be wrong."

Nods all 'round.

"Settles it," said Linus, "Good thing you found an expert on the matter."

"To the experts!" They lifted their drinks in toast.

Faulkner was gloomy darkness.

*

"Onward," Logan mumbled, as he spoke to the darkness about him.

His fingers traced carvings on the walls of the tunnels he limped through but couldn't see. The worn reliefs carried no more meaning now than when he'd first arrived at Yonder's Reach.

The deeper he crept the colder the darkness became. At first this had been comforting. He could breath easier and his gloves no longer burned at the touch of the walls. But that oppressive heat had been replaced by deep cold as the hours passed. He could feel his breath frosting even if he couldn't see it.

He no longer had a sense of whether he was moving upward or downward. He'd given up whistling after the first hour after going through the songs he knew twice. He was alive. For this, if nothing else, he was grateful.

Logan felt the shift in the air and the silence about him deepen. The reassuring and close echoes of his steps in the hallway he'd been guided by were replaced by the open air of an enormous expanse he could feel but not see.

From this silence of pure dark the voice boomed and reverberated through the ruins.

"You, will be my harbinger."

He felt the rush of wind pass through him as the words were spoken. Though terrified, he moved toward the voice ahead of him.

The voice continued.

"Give yourself to me, herald."

For the second time, Logan replied.

"Who are you?"

From the darkness came cold laughter.

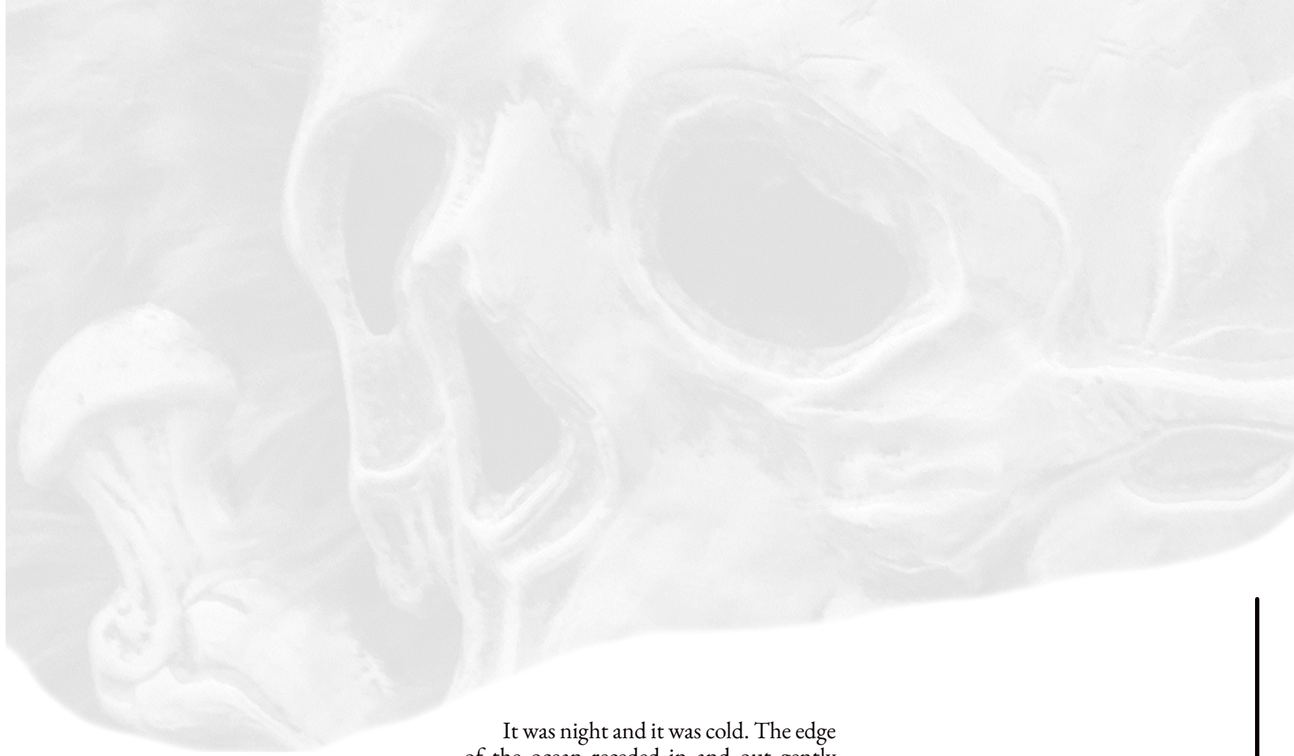
"Our doom wrought will be chaos manifest."

"Doom, then."

Logan felt it's chuckling breath and caught himself before he could fall backward with the weight of it.

He reached his hand up in the darkness...

*



It was night and it was cold. The edge of the ocean receded in and out gently with each wave, not caring what was coming. Logan's boots sucked at the wet sandy shore with each step he took.

The wind blew at the unwitting herald's back as he made for the public house at the closest thing to a run he could manage. He hoped this time would be different.

His hand felt heavy as he leaned his weary body against the door.

In his mind he remembered. The terror. The face. The fall of the Reach. Ships *flying* in the skies as the warden fled. So many dead.

"Doom," he whispered to himself.

Logan burst through the door of the tavern, and a hush fell there like so long ago in the Villa Swayne. He locked eyes with three startled old sea dogs and a fat man with a dirty bird across the other side of the busy tavern. One of them stood to leave.

"Run, you fools! Run! Raise your women, your children. Doom, the beast of Yonder's Reach comes. A feast upon all your souls. Abandon hope and flee. Ring your bells! Doom is nigh!"

He meant to yell, but his voice came out hoarse. He was a terrified mixture of exhaustion and exasperation. He stole away a half finished tankard of drink from a nearby table and finished the surprised man's drink in a swig.

Not a soul moved.

"Run, fools!" he yelled and stifled a sob which threatened to erupt.

Logan fled then at a mad run, the tavern door slamming shut behind him. He hammered on doors with his stolen mug , screaming for all in Delphi to flee and, maybe, be saved.

Back inside the Pickled boar, the evening continued on.

"See, this is what I mean," scoffed Tom sitting back down again, "You can't believe anything anyone tells you anymore."

Then there was a boom, and then another. A slow beat that shook all the world.

The windows of the tavern flashed as outside purple and blue electric fire blazed across the night's sky. Its embers fell like sheets of rain and exposed timber caught alight.

Something roared, and the sound of it took all of the warmth from the Pickled Boar.

Faulkner slowly walked to the window and peeked out. He saw the sky ablaze, and the frothing harbour it illuminated.

The beast *was* like a many eyed dragon come to life.

An armoured lizard the size of a castle. No, a mountain.

And Doom was upon them all.

"And there he was, right face to face with this beast! Enormous bloody bugger. Like a many eyed dragon come to life. An armoured lizard the size of a castle. No! A mountain, if you can believe it?" The young boy telling the story was better at picking pockets.

The seadogs sat quietly now listening to the tales of their neighbours. They said nothing as they sipped, perhaps fatigued from their last argument.

"They buried him deep, long long ago," came the chatter about them at another table behind them, "Old Jones that was, mind. And all the stories about him are all true."

"And it was all a puzzle! That the Queen lost something she didn't even know she had... On account of a piece played before she'd drawn even a single breath as a wee babe."

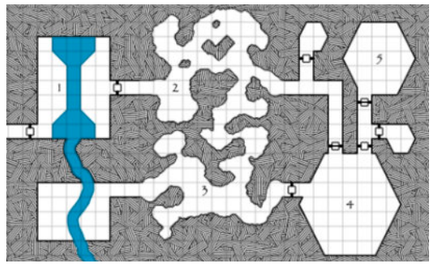
Knowing nods and forced looks of concern followed as were "proper given" in Delphi.

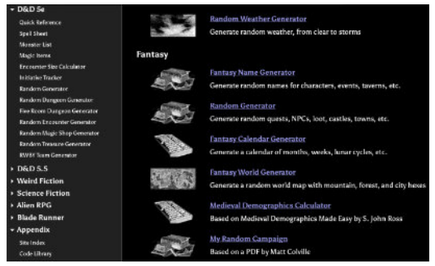
The girl threw another couple of logs on the open fire. The tavern was peaking, but she knew nights like this were longer than others.

SHAREWARE

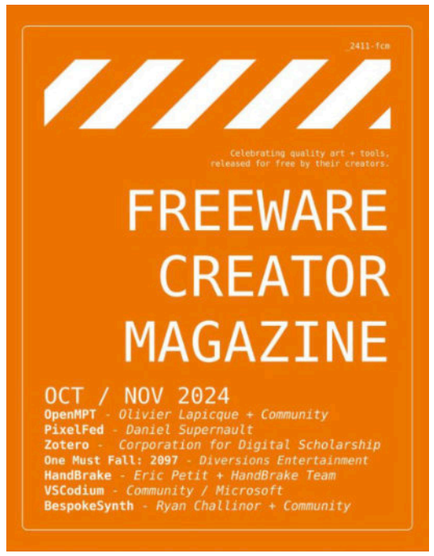
Free things to share with you.

DONJON - TTRPG GENERATORS
Web-tools
In our opinion this old-school TTRPG generator is a boon to both dungeon masters and players of all ilks and disciplines. Generate names, magic items, whole dungeons, shops and even towns!





FREEWARE CREATOR MAGAZINE
Zine
Created and written by South Australian game composer John Oestmann, this *free* magazine is published digitally regularly and is packed full of useful tools, games and content recommendations.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PixelFed - Daniel Supernault
Zotero - Corporation for Digital Scholarship
One Must Fall: 2097 - Diversions Entertainment
HandBrake - Eric Petit + HandBrake Team
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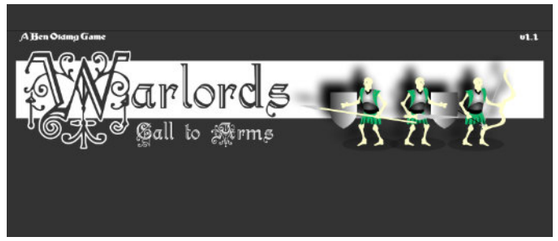
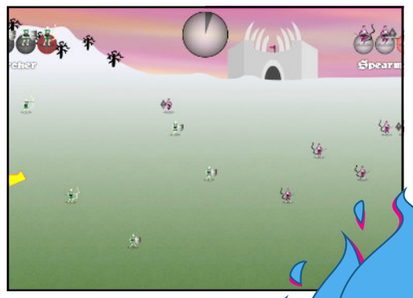
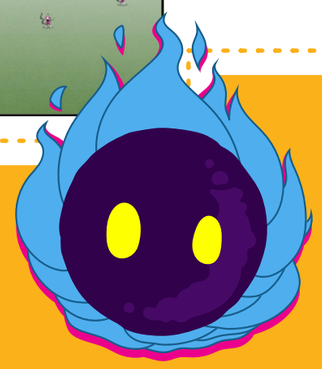


WARLORDS
Video game
Hosted by armorgames.com this *browser based fantasy strategy game* from 2008 hits harder than it has any right too! Recommended by composer Morgan Ridley-Smith, this game by Ben Olding is a new fave in 2025.





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BITTERWIND'S SEASON 01 PIRATE LEGENDS

Ahoy, ye brave Pirate Legends who ventured through the tempests of Bitterwind, Season 1! Yer salty feedback has charted our course true, and for that, we hoist our colours in gratitude. Behold, we etch yer namesakes below in crimson blood... or ink, if ye must be practical. But in yer mind's eye, let it flow as blood from the veins of the sea itself!

Ryan Hunter
Scott, Dook Dook
Interactive
Gurgundor
Munky
Peter Gray
Erin Crocker
Grant Dewar of the Clan Dewar
Deb
Sam Bartlett
Stephen Chapman
Metal Mum
K.R.

EARLY ADVENTURERS & BELIEVERS

Producing Adventure Calls has been a labor of love. Creating anything worthwhile demands sweat and effort, but our perseverance is fuelled by the support of our community and people like you. Your thoughts encouragement, enthusiasm, and energy have meant the world to us.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you!

Andrew Naish, "I game, therefore I am."
Simon Hartcher, "Don't have one!"
Stephen Macchia, Noisy Nit Games
Andrew Bluff, Rollerchimp
Josh Hallaran, Critical Games

To our family & friends, **Thank-you!**

Central Coast Game Developers

A heartfelt shoutout to our homebase game development community on the Central Coast of NSW, where we proudly produce Adventure Calls.

State Of Play

The legends over at State Of Play NSW are doing an amazing job advocating for and supporting indie game development in NSW. Thank you for all you are doing! Let's go!

state of play

GUILD MATTERS

For you, those who have become Legend.

SEE YOU NEXT TIME SPACE COWBOY...

That's issue zero of Adventure Calls! And we're already forging issue one! But Adventurer, we need your help. Tell us what you loved. How can we make this magazine the ultimate version of itself? Check out the Expansion Pak content and let us know. The QR code is on the next page.

Until next time, Legends. Be excellent to each other.
–The Kids From Yesterday

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Special thanks:
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Credits

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Adventure Calls is a fictional magazine occasionally colliding with reality. Crafted and curated with love on the Central Coast of Australia, Adventure Calls unites games and fiction from indie makers across all lands. We hope you will love what we make for you.

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